

What is New Urbanism and Traditional Neighborhood Development?

The term Traditional Neighborhood Development (TND) has been utilized in planning and development circles within the City since November 2001 when the Flagstaff Area Regional Land Use and Transportation Plan was adopted. Indeed, the Regional Plan contains numerous references to, and actively promotes the use of, Traditional Neighborhood Developments. Incentives to promote TNDs are also provided in the Land Development Code in Chapter 4.

New Urbanism emerged over the past two decades in response to the urban sprawl that has characterized development in most parts of America. From its earliest roots, the United States developed in the form of compact, mixed-use neighborhoods up to the first quarter of the last century. Urban development patterns began to change with the emergence of modern architecture and zoning and the expanded use of the automobile. Following World War II, neighborhoods were replaced with development patterns that separated land uses, i.e. conventional suburban development (CSD), or sprawl.

New Urbanism is an approach to urban planning and design that can be applied at a variety of scales, moving from a single block in an urban area to a large metropolitan region. At the neighborhood level, New Urbanism is often referred to as Traditional Neighborhood Development because it revives the urban form and character of US cities and towns built from the 1600s until World War II.



Early mixed-use compact traditional neighborhood development in the United States

New Urbanist developments do not seek to mimic past patterns of development. Instead, New Urbanist or Traditional Neighborhood developments strive to reinterpret the qualities of old patterns of building placement, design, and public spaces to suit modern living needs, including of course the needs of the automobile.



A new traditional neighborhood recently completed in Denver, CO

New Urbanism and Traditional Neighborhood developments are based on principles of planning and architecture that work together to create human-scale, walkable, functional and sustainable communities. They can be applied to either infill projects within a city, communities proposed on the periphery of cities, projects focused on transit-oriented development (TOD), or even entire cities.

From modest beginnings, the New Urbanism movement is now having a substantial impact on development in the US. More than 600 new towns, villages, and neighborhoods are planned or under construction in the US, using the principles of the New Urbanism. Additionally, hundreds of small-scale new urban infill projects are restoring the urban fabric of cities and towns by reestablishing walkable streets and blocks. Many Gulf Coast communities ravished by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita are rebuilding themselves based on these principles.

Principles of Traditional Neighborhood Development

The heart of the New Urbanism is in the design of neighborhoods, which can be defined by 13 elements, according to town planners Andres Duany and Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk, who founded the architecture and town planning firm Duany Plater-Zyberk & Co. (DPZ), and who are also two of the founders of the Congress for the New Urbanism (www.cnu.org).

An authentic neighborhood should contain most of these elements:

- 1) The neighborhood has a discernible center. This is often a square or a green and sometimes a busy or memorable street corner. A transit stop would be located at this center.
- 2) Most of the dwellings are within a five-minute walk of the center, an average of roughly 2,000 feet.
- 3) There are a variety of dwelling types — usually houses, rowhouses and apartments — so that younger and older people, singles and families, the poor and the wealthy may find places to live.
- 4) At the edge of the neighborhood, there are shops and offices of sufficiently varied types to supply the weekly needs of a household.
- 5) A small ancillary building is permitted within the backyard of each house. It may be used as a rental unit or place to work (e.g., office or craft workshop).
- 6) An elementary school is close enough so that most children can walk from their home.
- 7) There are small playgrounds accessible to every dwelling -- not more than a tenth of a mile away.
- 8) Streets within the neighborhood form a connected network, which disperses traffic by providing a variety of pedestrian and vehicular routes to any destination.
- 9) The streets are relatively narrow and shaded by rows of trees. This slows traffic, creating an environment suitable for pedestrians and bicycles.
- 10) Buildings in the neighborhood center are placed close to the street, creating a well-defined outdoor room.
- 11) Parking lots and garage doors rarely front the street. Parking is relegated to the rear of buildings, usually accessed by alleys.
- 12) Certain prominent sites at the termination of street vistas or in the neighborhood center are reserved for civic buildings. These provide sites for community meetings, education, and religious or cultural activities.
- 13) The neighborhood is organized to be self-governing. A formal association debates and decides matters of maintenance, security, and physical change. Taxation is the responsibility of the larger community.

The City of Flagstaff has some wonderful older traditional neighborhoods like the Old Town Site Neighborhood, Southside neighborhood, and the neighborhoods to the north and northwest of the Downtown area. These neighborhoods, as well as the Downtown area itself, provide a wealth of planning and architectural patterns that can be interpreted and applied in other areas of the City through the application of Traditional Neighborhood developments.



Photographs showing some architectural elements that reflect the City of Flagstaff's mountain architectural vernacular.



Artist renderings showing the urban character of this proposed TND project (Juniper Point) reflecting the City of Flagstaff's mountain architectural vernacular, with a corner store on the left, and a residential street on the right.

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